

78 SIMILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND KEFORMER

But he had already decided to sever his connection with his employers. Since the death of M. Louis Hachette in the summer of 1864, the young man's position in the firm had been growing difficult. His superiors looked askance at his literary efforts, as if they thought that he wrote stories and articles in the time for which they paid him. Moreover, as they themselves did not deal in revolutionary literature, they did not care to have one of their clerks associated with such work. "La Confession de Claude" seemed to them too outspoken ; and a few days after its publication, that is, at the end of November, 1865, one of the partners said to Zola: "You earn two hundred francs a month here. It is ridiculous ! You have plenty of talent, and would do better to take up literature altogether. You would find glory and profit in it."¹

Zola took the hint (conveyed pleasantly enough) and gave notice to leave at the end of the following January. And he was the better pleased at having adopted that course, arid. having averted, perhaps, a direct dismissal, as a few weeks after the appearance of "La Confession de Claude" tlie Procureur Imperial, otherwise the public prosecutor, influenced by certain reviews of the book, caused some inquiries to be made at Hachette's with respect to its

author. N^o
prosecution ensued, and " Madame Bovary " having escaped.
scot free, it is extremely doubtful if one would, have succeeded even in those days of judicial subserviency to the behests of the authorities, particularly as, whatever might; be the subject-matter of the "Confession," it was instinct; throughout with loathing and censure of the incidents it narrated. In any case, Zola, on writing to Valabregue early

¹ Pernand Xau's " Smile Zola." 12mo, 68 pages, Paris, 1880.